



Your Life, Your Way

WHO: Young people who are graduating from high school, as well as people who are on the Division of Developmental Disabilities' priority waiting list are offered the option for self-direction known as *Real Life Choices*. Individuals in both categories must also qualify for the Community Care Waiver. Eligible individuals and their families are invited by DDD to an information and orientation session to learn about this new way of accessing services.

WHAT: In 2002, the Governor released a systems change plan called *New and Expanded Options for New Jersey's Consumers with Developmental Disabilities and Their Families*. As a major part of this sweeping systems change, DDD developed *Real Life Choices* as an innovative method for people and their families to access truly personalized and self-directed services. *Real Life Choices* provides for equity in the services and supports offered by DDD; it also assures that all participants apply for the Community Care Waiver (CCW), and that all services and supports are CCW-eligible. In order to guarantee that all the elements of CCW eligibility were present when developing *Real Life Choices*, DDD used the quality framework from the Center for Medicaid Services (CMS). These elements of CCW eligibility include establishment of the role of a fiscal agent to provide financial assistance and accountability for public funds; the enhancement of Quality Management systems, including a renewed emphasis on measuring the achievement of outcomes; the assessment of the risks to health and safety for individuals being supported in their homes; and, the allocation of individual budgets based on a person's support needs.

WHY: *Real Life Choices* was created out of a desire to give a person and their family members a strong voice and the power to make their own choices, to offer them the flexibility to meet their unique needs, and to enable them to accommodate their individual lifestyles. The vision of *Real Life Choices* shifts the power from the professionals to the individual and their family members, and it recognizes that the individual should be able to direct the delivery of their own services. In *Real Life Choices*, success is not determined by a checklist. *Real Life Choices* does not measure hours of attendance at a day program, nor hours of respite care used in order to declare completion of service delivery; it looks instead at how the supports and services mapped out in a person's plan of care build independence, and at how satisfied the person and their family are with the results from that plan of care.

WHEN: The possibility for *Real Life Choices* can occur at two distinct points in time. The first is simply by graduating from high school. By definition, graduation means that an individual needs adult services, and the need for adult services creates the possibility for *Real Life Choices*. The second point of opportunity to receive *Real Life Choices* is when an individual's name comes up on the priority waiting list. When either of these two milestones of status change is reached, an individual and their family will be contacted by DDD and will be invited to attend a *Real Life Choices* information and orientation session.

HOW: *Real Life Choices* assists individuals and families with creating positive and desired outcomes through use of a person-centered thinking model, the Essential Lifestyle Plan (ELP). The ELP is a strengths-based tool that permits people and their families to go beyond the simple identification of service needs. It allows them to focus on what is important to them and permits them to build their personal choices into their plan. Because outcomes are identified by the individual, personal satisfaction becomes the major indicator of the achievement of those outcomes. It is through the personalized design and use of the ELP that the true power of *Real Life Choices* will be achieved by the individual receiving services and supports.